

Julianstown Bypass Briefing Note

Background

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority. Before the recession, local authorities could apply on a regular basis for grants for Specific (schemes costing less than €5m) and Strategic Improvement Grants (costing more than €5m) for the strengthening, widening or realignment of regional and local roads. However, the extent of the cutbacks in grant funding during the recession meant that these grant schemes had to be curtailed with effect from 2014 as the decision had to be made to prioritise expenditure on the maintenance and renewal of the network.

Any road improvement projects proposed by local authorities for consideration are assessed by the Department on a case-by-case basis. All projects put forward by local authorities for consideration must comply with the requirements of the Public Spending Code and the Department's Capital Appraisal Framework and it is important for local authorities to prioritise projects within their overall area of responsibility with these requirements in mind.

Project Ireland 2040

Under Project Ireland 2040 it is envisaged that 12 regional and local road improvement schemes will be implemented over the period to 2023. Some limited provision is also being made in the Project Ireland regional and local road capital budget for the appraisal of a pipeline of RLR projects. This is intended to cover the appraisal of projects for development, if possible, in the later years of the NDP.

It is important to emphasise that there continues to be very limited scope to advance new strategic regional and local road projects other than the committed projects in Project Ireland 2040 which include Meath County Council's Bettystown to Laytown road improvement scheme.

NTA Transport Strategy – Road Development Principles

The NTA's Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) 2016-2035 sets the overarching policy framework for transport infrastructure development in the region. This Strategy examines the future national, regional and local road network as part of its consideration of a Strategy aimed at addressing urban congestion and improving the efficiency and sustainability of the urban transport system in the GDA.

The Strategy sets out principles for road development in the GDA and those principles include:

- That alternative solutions such as public transport provision, traffic management or demand management measures cannot effectively and satisfactorily address the road proposal or are not applicable or appropriate together;
- Each proposed road scheme is consistent with the Strategy and Government policy;
- Each scheme does not diminish in any significant way the expected beneficial outcome of the Strategy.

Current position: Julianstown Bypass

The Department issued a Circular last year to all local authorities giving detailed guidance on the project appraisal process and the documentation required. In December 2018 Meath County Council submitted a draft Preliminary Appraisal for a bypass of Julianstown. The Appraisal indicates that in 2018 the Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) count was 20,472 and that between 2004 and 2018 traffic volumes were relatively static. Traffic volumes are still significantly lower than prior to the opening of the M1. Before the M1 opened traffic on the R132 was approaching 25,000.

There are many competing road improvement projects across the country and as with all other proposed schemes the Preliminary Appraisal will have to be considered taking available budgets and overall transport policy priorities into account.

In this context the National Transport Authority's Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area considers the measures needed to meet travel demand on the economic Drogheda to Dublin City Corridor and focuses largely on public transport options and improved rail services. This emphasis is reflected in Project Ireland 2040 which makes provision for the delivery of priority elements of the DART Expansion Programme including the electrification of existing lines. This includes electrification of the rail line to Drogheda.

Against the backdrop of the need for action to address climate change and limited resources, investment has to be focussed on the projects which best deliver on the Government's overall policy priorities and this means looking critically at proposals for new roads where public transport is being enhanced and where investment has already been made in high quality infrastructure such as the M1. The draft Preliminary Appraisal received from Meath County Council regarding a bypass of Julianstown will, therefore, have to be considered with the above factors in mind. The Department will liaise, as appropriate, with Meath County Council regarding the appraisal.